

ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

November 2004

THE VISIT

by Michael J. McKenna

The children seem to be happy,” my visitor said as we walked down the final hallway during her first visit to Rockbridge. I could tell there was a “However...” on the way.

“Well, we work very hard teaching the children that their work is a gift from God,” I said in response. “As his creatures, it’s our obligation to enjoy the good gifts he gives us, whether that be good food, a warm bed, or meaningful work to do.”

“I see,” she said, brow furrowed a bit, as it seemed she pondered that perspective for the first time.

“We want them to enjoy one another,” I continued, “but we want them to enjoy their work as well. After all, that’s why they’re here. And learning can be hard work.”

“Yes, but...is it all just work?” she asked, “Or are they permitted to have fun?”

“Let’s peek in down here, and see,” I said, as I guided her down the first grade hallway. As we walked, I told her of our field trips—Schooner Sultana, Williamsburg, Gettysburg, Europe—events such as the History Parade, our last two musicals, our growing sports program, Medieval feasts, Greek and Roman games, and on and on—all to help her understand that hard work and fun are not mutually exclusive ideas.

We looked into one of the first grade classrooms. The children had



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just come in from recess and were standing behind their chairs reciting their Bible memory verses.

“The children in grammar school do quite a bit of memorizing,” I explained. “In modern academia, memory work is often considered to be a lot of drudgery, which it would be for you and me. But look at these children....”

“Blessed is the man who does not walk (children pantomime walking)

in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand (children pantomime soldiers at attention) in the path of sinners, nor sit (children crouch in sitting positions) in the seat of scoffers!”

“They’re having a great time,” I continued, “but they also learn a lot this way.”

“That’s fine for the younger children,” she said, “but what about the older students?”

“Let’s go see,” I said, as I motioned to her to follow me upstairs.

When we reached the U.S. History class, we peeked in at the students debating.

“At the dialectic level,” I explained, “students no longer enjoy memorizing like they used to at the grammar level. But what they really enjoy is proving their point and disproving that of their opponents. Do you have teenagers?” I asked. She looked at me out of the side of her eyes and gave me one of those wry smiles that suggested she knew exactly what I was talking about.

“These students are reenacting, sort of, the historical debate between Cotton Mather and Roger Williams, as to the proper relationship between the church and the state. They love going after these ideas and challenging the assumptions and statements of their classmates. It’s a lot of work for these kids to prepare their arguments and speak publicly this way, as kids tend

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THE VISIT...continued

to be so self-conscious at this age, but they enjoy it.”

“They look like they’re enjoying themselves,” she agreed.

“Follow me,” I said, as I lead her further down the hallway.

“This is a senior history class called History of the Great Ideas II,” I explained. “It’s a class we developed to coincide with the natural grain of the students at this level—the rhetoric level.

“The students do a lot of discussing in this class, because we want them to wrestle with these ideas, bouncing their thoughts off of their classmates, and practicing intelligent, eloquent speech as they go. This kind of give-and-take would be very hard for younger students, but how do these young men and women seem to be handling it?” I asked.

“It looks like they’re having a grand time, too,” she admitted.

“I’ve heard many of them say that this is their favorite class,” I added. “They enjoy it, but they’re learning a great deal about the progression of ideas and how history has been influenced by them.

“You see,” I continued, “we believe that God requires us to grow in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. I also believe that the *Trivium*, the classical model we use here, is a practical application of that biblical pattern. The grammar stage is a knowledge stage in which students acquire useful knowledge. The dialectic stage is a time in which students gain understanding, growing in their thinking and reasoning skills through the application of formal logic. And the wisdom stage is the rhetoric stage in which students grow in their ability to use the means of persuasion, and understand which means are appropriate in which situations. It’s not just a fancy public speaking class; they’re growing in wisdom.”

“What about electives?” my visitor inquired. “You obviously have limited space here, so I imagine your ability to offer a wide variety of electives is limited as well.”

“Do you know why I’m called the ‘headmaster,’ and not ‘principal?’” I asked in response to her question.

“No,” she said, obviously wondering why I would answer her question with an apparently unrelated question of my own.

“Historically, teaching was considered an endeavor in which a teacher, known as a ‘master,’ would pour his life into the life of the student. Obviously, by virtue of the fact that teachers knew what the students needed to know, they were called masters. It was assumed that the students, not being fully taught yet, were not in the best position to know what it was they needed to know. This idea of students choosing what they want to learn is diametrically opposed to thousands of years of educational practice. It’s really a strident departure from traditionally classical and Christian education.”

“But...”

“Having said that,” I continued, “we do have a few carefully chosen electives that help capitalize on the rest of the education being offered here, giving our students an opportunity to use their particular gifts accordingly.

“For the athletically gifted we offer both boys’ and girls’ soccer, basketball, and lacrosse. On the artistic side of things, we have a drawing elective, concert choir, and yearbook. We also have a debate team. In addition, to give our students an ability to practice their rhetorical skills, every other year we perform a full-length musical. So far we’ve done *Music Man* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. These were great opportunities for our students to work hard and pull together something far beyond what they thought they were able to, and they function as tremendous community builders here at the school as well. In addition to technical electives, per se, we also have a Black Tie Club in which our students attend cultural events such as opera, theatre, the symphony, and so forth. We’re involved in local Latin competitions on occasion. Our seniors now have the opportunity to pursue independent study, internships, and college or university courses, all for credit. If these don’t combine with the entire program to give our students both breadth *and* depth, I don’t know what will.

“In short, beyond what would be considered the core of the curriculum, our students have ample opportunity to take advantage of electives.”

“It all sounds interesting,” my visitor continued, “but I have another question for you.”

“Go ahead,” I encouraged her, as we made our way back to my office.

“I wonder. What are you doing, as a school, to make your student body look more like the body of Christ?” she asked.

“I’m not sure I know what you mean,” I said.

“Well, the body of Christ isn’t all one color,” she explained. “There are African-Americans and Asians and Latinos in the body of Christ. What steps are you taking to make your school look more like that?”

“Nothing,” I said matter-of-factly. She looked a bit taken aback, so I figured I better keep explaining.

“Frankly, I don’t look at the kids that way. I couldn’t tell you how many of which color we have here, even though we do have them. But let me say this,” I continued, without trying to sound like I was her schoolmaster attempting to give her a lecture.

“I believe that God wants us to grow more and more closely in the image of Christ every day,” I said. “So the premise of your question is absolutely correct: as a Christian school headmaster, I have to be concerned that my student body looks more and more like the body of Christ.”

“So why did you say you’re not doing anything about that?” she asked, her voice more than just curious.

“Let me explain,” I continued. “I think what we should be concerned about is that our students look like the body of Christ *in terms of character*, not skin color. I’m concerned about how these children look *on the inside*. That’s why we make such a big issue out of character development here. If a student rolls his eyes at his teacher, or huffs in disapproval at some instruction, or fails to wear his tie or tuck his shirt in after I’ve told him repeatedly, that’s not ‘kids being kids,’ that’s disrespect or disobedience, and we take it seriously. By focusing on their sanctification—on their growth in Christ—*that’s* how we’ll work to ensure that our students are looking more and more like the body of Christ, without spot or blemish. I’ll leave how many ethnic groups we have represented here up to their parents and the sovereignty of God, not our admissions policy.”

“Well, thank you for your time. I’ve got to be going,” she concluded as she stood up to take her leave. “As I said, it all sounds very interesting.”

SAT SCORES— HOW IS ROCKBRIDGE DOING?

The following information was published in the Maryland Gazette on September 4, 2004. We've added Rockbridge Academy's scores to let you see how we are doing.

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2003-04 SAT AVERAGE SCORES

SCHOOLS	VERBAL AV.	MATH AV.	TOTALS
Annapolis	525	529	1054
Arundel	503	511	1014
Broadneck	548	542	1090
Chesapeake	502	535	1037
Glen Burnie	482	505	987
Meade	490	492	982
North County	494	508	1002
Northeast	503	510	1013
Old Mill	508	531	1039
Severna Park	560	578	1138
South River	547	563	1110
Southern	539	557	1096
COUNTY	523	536	1059
MARYLAND	511	515	1026
NATIONAL	508	518	1026
Rockbridge	677	663	1340

DEBATE COMPETITIONS

"Resolved: That the United States federal government should establish a foreign policy substantially increasing support of United Nations peacekeeping operations."

(Yes, you may now take a breath.) Policy debate teams throughout the nation will wage war over this, the year's wordy but carefully crafted resolution. Rockbridge submitted two of its seven debate teams to the year's first tournament. The four daring disputers—Kenny Trovato/Chris Janvier, and Andy Morsberger/Matt Brown—stepped forth to test the waters for the rest of the crew. Both teams managed to pass through the four-hour crucible of cross-examination and blistering rebuttals. The Trovato/Janvier team, affectionately known as "JET," went undefeated for all three rounds, taking 1st place with the rank of "superior." Andy was 1st place in the category of individual speaker. It's a great start, but we have a long road ahead, and it's going to be paved with some stiff competition. Please keep us in prayer as we seek to honor the Lord in this very challenging venue. If you would like to offer your services as a judge, please contact Mr. Finkbeiner at bfinkbeiner@rockbridge.org.

ROCKBRIDGE ATHLETICS

Plans are actively being drawn for our winter basketball teams. Coaches and facilities are needed for both our girls' and boys' teams. If you would like to be a part of our coaching staff or have ideas for indoor basketball locations, please contact Donna Griffith at dgriffith@rockbridge.org.

COLLEGE NIGHT

Regardless of what grade your child is in, you won't want to miss Rockbridge Academy's College Night. Come and hear about what's being done to prepare our students for college admissions. Please join us on Friday, November 5, 2004, at 7:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall at Rockbridge Academy.

*Consider giving
to Rockbridge
Academy.
Here's How.*

GENERAL GIFTS

General gifts are used to meet the widest possible array of needs at Rockbridge Academy. General gifts are useful because of their flexibility.

DESIGNATED GIFTS

A designated gift can be used to support a specific aspect of Rockbridge Academy's program, such as the athletic program, the science program, or the music program.

MATCHING GIFTS

Many employers have a matching gift program to help their employees' gifts go further. Ask your employers if they have such a program. Rockbridge Academy will be happy to work with your employer to help establish a matching gifts program.

SECURITIES

Gifts such as stocks, bonds, mutual funds, even insurance policies, may be made directly to Rockbridge Academy. Typically, such gifts provide the giver with beneficial tax advantages.

You are encouraged to support Rockbridge Academy through these or other means. To make a gift, please contact the headmaster, Michael McKenna, at:

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www.rockbridge.org



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOV 2SCHOOL CLOSED—Teacher Planning Day

NOV 5.....College Night @ 7:30 p.m.

NOV 16-23Parent/Teacher Conferences After School/Evening

NOV 24-26SCHOOL CLOSED—Thanksgiving Holiday

DEC 17 ..Christmas Concert at Chesapeake Arts Center @ 7:00 p.m.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

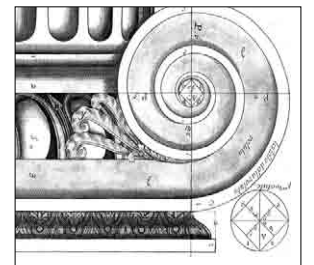
“People are responsible for the character of their Congress. If that body be ignorant, reckless, and corrupt, it is because the people tolerate it. If it be intelligent, brave, and pure, it is because the people demand these high qualities.”

—PRESIDENT JAMES GARFIELD

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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